

Crossing Mental and Bodily Borders: Ritual Touching in the Context of Worship



Introduction

This article discusses seen and unseen boundaries and the possibilities of crossing them in the congregational and liturgical context. Our research method was collaborative autoethnography. The text is the result of a year-and-a-half-long process consisting of joint conversations, individual reflection, and conference presentations in a working group setting. We have not tried to blur our differences but to bring forward the richness of our experiences of lived Lutheran Mass and Orthodox liturgy. Our approach is more than a theoretical comparison of two Christian denominations and their liturgies, and is based on our experiences of Mass and liturgy and our discussions about them.

During our first discussions, we were searching for common ground:

Leena: 'I am interested in mental borders – identity. What distinguishes me from others, us from them? There is a border even without giving it any specific value.'

Riikka: 'There is a mental border, even within myself. How can I as a church musician use my creativity to help the church to meet this time? I want to build and create but not break anything.'

Tuomas: 'Mental borders exist within every religion and liturgy. They are also geographical. I hear in your discussion a question: how to make the tradition alive?'

Hilkka-Liisa: 'We can bring the old traditions and wisdom to this day when we give our whole heart to it.'

(Group discussions, 21 January 2022 & 15 February 2022.)

The entire process has been meaningful to us since it has broadened our thinking in cherishing the multiple possibilities of crossing borders in the liturgy. ‘Listening with a generous attitude and hospitality’ has been our guiding principle, to borrow a concept that will be opened up later in this text. Listening is a way to cross borders, but to be hospitable while doing so, attentiveness, openness, mutuality, and a will to understand each other are essential.

We begin by describing our research process and the research method we have employed. What follows is Riikka’s text in which she ponders the way singing – as an invisible, borderless medium – challenges our concept of borders in the context of worship. Riikka is a cantor in the Orthodox Church of Finland. Thus, she presents quite a different religious and liturgical background compared to the other participants in this working group. Leena continues with her exploration of how it feels to be at borders and what could be found on the other side or in between them. How does one create a ‘mutual tuning-in relationship’ and yet prevent one’s own self from blending with others? As a Lutheran church musician who has worked in multicultural contexts, she has seen, experienced, and also crossed many kinds of borders – sometimes in a very concrete way, sometimes more figuratively. Often, these border crossings have had connections to worship. Tuomas, a Lutheran pastor, focuses on touching in the Finnish Lutheran liturgical context. With an example of a handshake in the greeting of peace, he traces the socio-cultural environment where many Finnish Lutheran Christians hesitate to engage in ritual touching of each other. Hilikka-Liisa is a researcher, teacher, and performer of Gregorian chants and a developer and cantor in the *Meditative Mass with mediaeval melodies* in the Lutheran congregation in Kallio, Helsinki. She examines generosity as an attitude in singing and listening in the liturgy. She combines mediaeval monastic singing orders with modern socio-pedagogical thoughts about hospitality as an everyday practice in meeting other people. At the end of the article, we bring together our thoughts about the concept of ritual touching.

Our goal has been to identify and explore various mental and bodily borders and to find ways to cross them respectfully. In our group, after discussing mental borders, we broadened our perspective towards bodily borders and different forms of touching:

Riikka: ‘Have we talked enough about bodily borders? We need them.’

Tuomas: ‘Let us gather around the campfire. Let us find the borders, examine them and discuss the bridging possibilities.’

Hilikka-Liisa: ‘We also need intuitive touching and equality through physical position. The bridging can happen only if we are equal.’

Leena: 'Singing connects and touches us in many ways. We can sing many kinds of music. We can sing even when we cannot talk. It can bring us to the same level.'

Tuomas: 'How can we move towards liturgy? Why and how do I like to touch and to be touched?'

(Group discussion, 16 March 2022.)

We did not find borders a negative matter. Instead, in our thinking they are connected to respect, safety, and acceptance. Borders are needed but they should not be understood as a total separation from others. Borders exist in many contexts and situations. There are cultural borders around touch and even eye contact, gender conventions, and conventions based on age and hierarchy of various kinds. Some people have a personal antipathy to physical contact or eye contact with others. Additionally, the needs of neurodiverse people in public gatherings have to be considered, as do rules surrounding the protection of children.

Our discussions, reflections, and the different perspectives we have had concerning borders in the liturgical context have led us to employ the concept of 'ritual touching' in our text. Although not in common use – at least not to our knowledge and in this particular context – we chose to use this term as it manages to incorporate several components that have accompanied us during this process.

A ritual refers to repetition, continuity, and regularity. A central ritual theorist Ronald L. Grimes (2014: 195) usually gives this definition for his students with a wish that it would inspire them to deeper conversation: 'Ritual is embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment.' This definition suits well the theme of this article, ritual in a Christian liturgical context. Liturgy can be understood as a ritual because 'it consists of actions and ceremonies repeated on a regular basis' (Usher 2010: 20). Familiar rituals provide people with an understanding of what is happening now and what will come next, which in turn creates a sense of safety. As a repeated and predictable flow of events, rituals are calming – in the same way as when singing a familiar song, we know where the tune and the lyrics will take us. However, despite the repetition and continuity, rituals are not invariable but dynamic and changeable in nature (Post 2022: 747). As Paul Post (2022: 753), professor of ritual studies, states, 'rituals do not exist in a vacuum'. They are exposed to various cultural, social, economic, and political influences.

By touching we mean being in connection with other people, ourselves, or God in various ways. Touching can happen through our senses, be it hearing and/or listening, sight, actual physical touch, smell, taste or, for instance, with one's voice. Philosopher Richard Kearney (2021: 9–10) connects the words tact and tactfulness with touching.

Deriving from the Latin *tango-tangere-tactum*, ‘tact expresses a “common touch” in our way of heeding, humouring and handling others’. According to Kearney, being tactful with someone does not always imply physical proximity. It can as well be sensitivity to the right space between oneself and another. Tact can also be connected to touch through the senses. For example, tactful sound we can call resonance, tactful smell fragrance, and tactful sight insight. Although in this text we approach touching from a positive point of view, we recognise the fact that it can also be inappropriate and cause a lot of suffering. As Kearney (2021: 12–13) states, there are ‘perversions and pathologies of touch’, varying from heinous crimes to everyday acts of insensitivity. In unilateral abusive touching (‘betrayal of tact’) the one who touches refuses ‘to acknowledge the other as singular and equal’.

Kearney’s ‘tact’ is very close to the idea of ‘hospitality’ we use in this paper. Discussions about hospitality in touching and listening led us to employ the concept of ritual touching, since we concentrate on various ways of touching in ritual and worship. We set out to explore our experiences of how the various forms of touching are connected to crossing borders in the liturgical context.

Collaborative autoethnography and the research process

The research method we have employed in our work is collaborative autoethnography. Chang et al. (2012: 23–25) define it as a qualitative research method ‘in which researchers work in community to collect their autobiographical materials and to analyse and interpret their data collectively to gain a meaningful understanding of sociocultural phenomena’. This means that the research process is a combination of group and individual effort. Each person acts as a researcher and a research participant, which ‘creates a rich space for meaning-making and analysis’. This kind of collaboration benefits the researchers and their work by making it possible to examine, reflect on, and analyse the topics in question from a broader perspective than would be possible through individual work only. In addition, collaborative autoethnography provides an opportunity for interdisciplinary border crossings.

Our research process started with group sharing and discussions that alternated with individual reflection and writing. Those ideas were then formulated into conference presentations. What followed was another phase of discussions and reflection both individually and as a group. Like the other steps, writing was a combination of group and solo work (for the iterative process of collaborative autoethnography, see Chang et al. 2012: 24). We experienced this process as fruitful and eye-opening, especially because of the interdisciplinary and interdenominational approach. Combining different thoughts, traditions, and timetables was not always easy, but we feel that the final product and

process itself have been worth all the effort.

Part of us always reaches out for a world with no boundaries (Riikka Patrikainen)

My bodily existence is marked with borders: I begin here, and I end here. Neither is my life limitless, it has a beginning, and it has an end, it has boundaries. At the same time, we feel this continuous need for connection and crossing the borders that divide us.

Borders certainly have many different functions in our life. On the one hand, they protect us and make us what we are: I am not you and you are not me. On the other hand, borders might become an obstacle to bonding between people. Therefore, it is important to give time to ponder over the many meanings the borders have – when they are needed for the sake of our identity as Christians, and when they become an obstacle to loving each other as Christians. The conversations in our group gave me the possibility to look closer at my own borders: What are they made of? Which borders are needed for my own identity, and which ones are not? How can I as a Finnish Orthodox cantor bond with others from different religious backgrounds in the context of worship?

I am a cantor (singer) in the Orthodox Church of Finland. I feel that especially singing is a way of expression that reminds us that although we live in a world with borders, there is a part of us that always reaches out for a world with no boundaries. According to my own professional experience as a singer, singing is a particularly strong medium for bonding between people. Singing crosses borders that define our identity, such as ethnicity and religion, but also borders that are made of the lack of other means of communication, like in infancy or with dementia. Maybe due to its powerfulness, singing has a central place in Orthodox worship since all the liturgy is sung from the beginning till the end.

When I am singing in Orthodox worship, I present a continuum of a tradition that took its form over a thousand years ago during the Byzantine era (see, e.g., H. Seppälä 1981: 15–16). In the service, I give my voice to the church to speak the words that were made hundreds of years ago by talented poets and teachers of the church – even thousands of years, when it comes to the Book of Psalms. The aspects of continuity and rich inheritance are important to me as a liturgical singer, but not only for me: cherishing the idea of changelessness is not unique among the Orthodox. One of the most famous Eastern Orthodox theologians of our time, bishop Kallistos Ware (1934–2022), ponders this in his book *The Orthodox Church* (1997 [1964]) as follows: ‘Orthodox Christians of today see themselves as heirs and guardians to a rich inheritance received from the past, and they believe that it is their duty to transmit this inheritance unimpaired to the future’. Ware

warns us of the danger of going to extremes with this, since:

[n]ot everything received from the past is of equal value, nor is everything received from the past necessarily true. [...] There is a difference between 'Tradition' and 'traditions': many traditions which the past has handed down are human and accidental – pious opinions (or worse), but not a true part of the one Tradition, the fundamental Christian message. It is absolutely essential to question the past. (Ware 1997 [1964]: 195–197, emphasis added.)

The church is not a museum, quite the opposite! Each liturgy is a living encounter between the visible and the invisible, communication between me, you, and God (Ware 2004: 32–33). In what ways can I, as a cantor, use my talents to make the Tradition alive today? Do I only repeat what is already done or do I take the challenge to create something within the context of worship? What is my responsibility as an Orthodox cantor in bringing forth the Tradition for the generations to come?

Thus, we have many borders to contemplate inside our different Christian traditions, but also between the traditions. How could one create a natural connection between people and between denominations mentally and even bodily in the context of ecumenical worship? The task of common understanding and solutions for this is not easy. Even the past of Eastern and Western churches has not been shaped by the same periods of history (e.g., Scholasticism, Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment) for over a thousand years. One of the consequences of the history of the Western church is the 'mental over bodily' mentality, which Tuomas discusses further in his chapter in the Lutheran context. This is not the case in the Orthodox church where bodily activity is quite central in the worship.

Maybe for this reason, in our working group, the theme of ritual touching was the most complex one for me. I come from a tradition with a strongly prescribed way to perform rituals or touch ritually (e.g., kissing as a sign of veneration, blessing by touching, and ritual kisses after the Holy Communion) with no surprises in the liturgical context. The questions about ritual touching that arise in an ecumenical context were totally new for me and made me look again at my borders as a Christian: What are the protecting borders that are made of love to construct our identities as people and our traditions as different churches? How do we respect people from different backgrounds, for we cannot create bonding between us without the experience of safety and respect in the context of worship? Last, but not least: how can we achieve this experience of mutual safety and respect so that we can come together in the atmosphere of friendship, with a *generous attitude*, like Hilikka-Liisa describes in her chapter?

I believe that the first step towards this common understanding and common

worship is a dialogue, a conversation where we, most of all, listen carefully to each other. Everyone must be heard, not only the loudest people, as usually happens. Being a member of the Finnish Orthodox Church means belonging to a minority church in Finland with approximately 60,000 members. The Orthodox form about one per cent of the Finnish population (Kalkun et al. 2018: 5–6). In the working group, all the three other participants were Lutheran. This set-up reminded me of the challenge of how to make the viewpoint of a lesser-known tradition be heard and eventually understood in a common discussion.

We have different borders, we come from different backgrounds, and our life experiences are different. All this we bring together when we come together. The dialogue, as I have learnt in this working group during our common work, is not only about getting to know the others – it is also learning about oneself. We should not subdue our differences, quite the opposite: many of the differences we have can be celebrated as a richness we share! Despite our different identities and backgrounds, we are unified in our goal, which is to find a safe and respectful connection between us.

By testing the boundaries that we think define us, we might understand better the boundaries that protect our identities. A strong and honestly defined identity is the best ground for building dialogue and collaboration between people.

At borders (Leena Lampinen)

Where are my boundaries and where are those of the people around me? Who am I (not)? Who are we (not)? We may be together, but we are not the same. There is something – a line, a border, a boundary, physical and/or mental – between me and others, or between our group and other groups, that separates me from others and defines where I am and where other people are. Various elements of our lives, such as ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious, are woven together forming who we are and what our (cultural) identities are like (see Hall 1996: 596). We carry with us our experiences of life, both mental and bodily, that are part of us also at the present moment. Our mental boundaries result from the circumstances and situations in which we live, and they could be seen as a frame of one's own thoughts. Since we are in constant interaction with other people, our boundaries are continually redrawn and renegotiated.

We need other people and interaction with them to make sense of who we are, but borders are needed as well so that we can be our individual and unique selves. We belong to various groups, communities, organisations, classes, cultures, and so on, but as separate persons. To borrow the idea of Croatian protestant theologian Miroslav Volf (2019 [1996]: 50), 'belonging without distance destroys [...] but distance without belonging isolates'. Distance is a way to draw a line between myself and other people and to prevent

me from blending with the selves of others. However, it is important to remember that distance does not need to be understood as a total separation. Boundaries or borders can be crossed. Interaction and communication are possible over them.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1996: 19) has stated that 'one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs', meaning the situations when 'one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns'. Where is my place and how should I act? With whom or where do I belong? What is the distance at which I feel comfortable and safe? Being at borders and looking across them may evoke many kinds of questions since one is not sure what is going to happen or what is waiting on the other side. When crossing borders, do we directly enter another space or someone else's space, or is there perhaps a space between me and the other person, a space for us to meet? How could we cross borders sensitively and with respect? How do my ideas, previous experiences, and values resonate with those of other people?

This border crossing point or intersection of boundaries provides a platform for exploration – especially of one's own assumptions, attitudes and feelings, and it could be called in-between space, or third space (Bhabha 1994), or liminality (Turner 1991 [1969]). However, I see it rather as a 'potential space', as a space of possibilities. Potential space, a concept originally introduced by psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott, refers to 'an intermediate area of experiencing' (Ogden 1992: 205). It is a space of creativity and the space where communication between individuals takes place (Davis & Wallbridge 1991: 64–65). Respectful encounter requires openness and appreciation of the other, as we enter that common space with all that we are and have. Both listening and hearing are needed (Baldwin 2016: 77). I see potential space as connected to generous thinking and hospitality which Hilikka-Liisa will discuss later in this paper.

The easiest way to search for connection with others may be through features, experiences, and ideas that we have in common. However, it is also important to acknowledge differences between people in order to reach a deeper level of interaction (Ryde 2009: 114). Differences should not be ignored, since they mark the uniqueness of each person (or group). One should start by recognising and honouring differences and diversity within oneself since they lay the foundation for 'healthy recognition of alterity in others' (Baldwin 2016: 79–80).

It is possible, despite the differences, to build 'a mutual tuning-in relationship' (Schütz 1951: 79) that reaches over the borders. This concept signifies 'a precommunicative process in which self and other are experienced as sharing "we-ness"' (Neitz & Spickard 1990: 27). In the context of worship that combines the public and the individual, singing, listening, and/or hearing are ways to cross borders and to reach towards others. Singing and listening involve both mind and body, and they require attentive presence and consideration of other people. This creates a state in which one is open and tuned in to

both receive and give, touch and be touched in various ways, be it singing, hearing, eye contact, handshake, or something else.

The border-crossing handshake in the Finnish Lutheran Mass (Tuomas A. Meurman)

As a working group we held a workshop at the conference *Encounters at Borders and Across Borders* in Helsinki in May 2022. There was a certain moment in our group's planning discussions that I recall as a very formative one:

Tuomas: Let us do a bodily introduction to the subject [at the conference workshop]: we can ask the attendees to touch the hand of the person next to them and then ponder the ideas, feelings, and connotations that arise from that gesture. As a very simple bodily exercise of crossing the border, to find borders, to examine borders, to discuss the bridging possibilities...

Riikka: I must say that touching a stranger feels like a problem to me.

(Group discussion, 16 March 2022.)

This brief exchange of ideas and feelings led us to shape an exercise of touching in the broad sense of the term, an exercise involving the attendees of the workshop consciously touching others with their preferred ways of touching: not just by hands, as I first thought, but also by voice or eye-contact. At the opening of the workshop session, I gave simple instructions for the exercise and advised the attendees to reflect on a few questions during and after it: Which way of touching do you prefer, and why? What would be the outcome of crossing one of your borders? These questions then served as an opening to discuss further the crossing of borders in liturgical practices from the viewpoint of emotions, cultures, and theology, considering the concepts of 'touching' and 'border' opened up as diverse collections of different viewpoints as presented in our *Introduction* above.

During the 10-minute exercise people preferred mostly touching with voice. When producing a singing sound with their voice some of the participants closed their eyes in a way I interpreted as showing that they preferred to avoid touching with hands. Some attendees stood up and walked closer to others, offering their hand(s) to be touched. Some remained at their original place and posture, seeking eye contact with others. An established eye contact was often accompanied by a gesture of smiling. Similarly, those

people seeking vocal contact with others could be heard singing harmonic intervals or in unison with each other, which I interpreted to mean that they willingly sought to touch each other with their voices. There was an atmosphere of meeting each other at the borders, or between the borders of individuals, in the potential space (citing the terminology of Riikka and Leena above), an atmosphere of tactfulness where the acts of touching were ‘listening and responding to the other in a responsible way’ and ‘forming a proper relation of mutuality between perceiver and perceived’ (Kearney 2021: 11, 16–17). We were conscious of the position of the other, watching and touching each other in a generous way.

Further in this article, Hilikka–Liisa proposes generosity as an attitude to chanting and listening in liturgy. Taking these insights from our workshop opening exercise to a more general level in terms of liturgical activity, I return to touching as understood in its primary or most common way: to touch something with one’s skin, most often by hand(s). Constantly, the discussions of the role of touch in the liturgy of the Finnish Lutheran church tend to revolve around the question of whether people have to touch others when attending a worship service. The issue is present in the example of the greeting of peace during Mass. Although it is a theme that I am well acquainted with through the many undocumented talks and discussions with Lutheran church-going people around Finland, I think it becomes also visible at the official level, namely through a detailed look at the order of the Mass in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

When a Finnish Lutheran Mass proceeds to the moment of *Pax* (the greeting of peace), there is a liturgical chanted dialogue between the presiding minister and the worshipping congregation: ‘The peace of the Lord be with you – and also with your spirit.’ Many Christians worldwide would assume that the greeting would then be distributed in the worshipping congregation by attendees shaking hands with each other or embracing those around them with the greeting ‘Peace of the Christ!’ or ‘Peace be with you!’ (as a modernisation of the holy kiss, see, e.g., Senn 2016: 68–69). However, the Finnish Lutheran service usually proceeds straightforwardly to the chanting of *Agnus Dei* without any distribution of the greeting, although the worship book *Jumalanpalvelusten kirja* (2000: 33) contains as an option the inviting people to greet each other by saying, for instance, ‘Peace of the Christ!’

In fact, in the manual of liturgy of the Finnish Lutheran church titled *Palvelkaa Herraa iloiten* [‘Serve the Lord with gladness’] (2009: 27), the handshake does exist as a possibility: ‘One of the eucharistic assistants or the deacon can invite people to greet each other with peace. It is recommended that a sign of peace (cf. e.g., 1. Cor. 16:20 [the holy kiss]) be added, for example a handshake.’ It is noteworthy that the vocabulary here, compared to many other orders presented in the manual, carries a sense of suggesting, not obliging. Together with the common notion that one encounters the handshake-greeting-of-peace

very seldom in a Finnish Lutheran Mass, this raises the question of why there is so much hesitation about ritual touching of others with hands in this context, and even an actual avoidance.

One major factor behind this phenomenon is the Finnish touching culture in general. Taina Kinnunen and Marjo Kolehmainen have made pioneering research work on opening up the issue in their article *Touch and affect. Analysing the archive of touch biographies* (Kinnunen & Kolehmainen 2019). Their theoretical deliberations based on 'touch biographies' written by people of various backgrounds in the 2010s construct a cultural framework of Finnish touching habits. They stress the importance of past experiences that, transmitted across generations, shape present experiences (Kinnunen & Kolehmainen 2019: 32). In their analysis, two main factors arise: collective post-war trauma and twentieth-century childcare ideals turn out to be keys to understanding the Finnish touching culture. The traumatic experiences of wartime (especially the Winter and Continuation Wars in 1939–1946, not to forget the Civil War a few decades earlier in 1918) and post-wartime continued to haunt new generations through silences, distances, violence, and mental disorders. The pervading pedagogics in childcare until the 1960s included strict discipline and physical punishment. These factors together form a touching culture where there is a fear of violence and an avoidance of touching and closeness, alongside a sense of and longing for care, love, and energetic warmth (Kinnunen & Kolehmainen 2019: 36–37, 49–50).

Regarding the Finnish Lutheran liturgical touching culture, the prevailing culture of avoiding or minimising touching also has other roots. In the bigger picture, the Reformation and especially the Enlightenment have moved the focus of Western Christian Protestant liturgies from bodily to mental activity, stressing the right mindset and thinking at the expense of touching, smelling, and tasting the sacred (Hulmi 2019: 108–113; Senn 2016: 3–5); mental over bodily, to make it short and exaggerated.

The liturgical touching culture of avoidance, however, has been challenged by a few trends that emerged during the 1900s and reached Finnish Lutheran worship life by the early 2000s. First, there is a post-war trend to ecumenicalise (internationalise) liturgical culture in the Finnish Lutheran Church. The findings of Catholic liturgists of the early 1900s were manifested in Vatican II. In the Finnish Lutheran Church this encouraged liturgists to import and revive liturgical gestures from the tradition and practices of the Catholic Church. The shaking of hands as the greeting of peace is an example of this kind of influence at the official liturgical level (cf. Senn 2016: 359).

Second, there has been a revival of the body in Finnish Lutheran Christianity that has to do with a larger international phenomenon, namely the holistic approach that challenges the dematerialising tendency in modern Western thinking (Hulmi 2019: 110; Kearney 2021: 34; Senn 2016: 5–8). Lately, this has been visible, for instance, in Finnish

Lutheran spirituality literature that takes touching and bodily postures and movement as a key way of practising spirituality. To name just a few, *Piirrän sinuun tarinan* ['I draw a story on you'] (Aitlahti & Reinikainen 2020) brings forth a method of telling Biblical stories as well as common hymns and prayers with touching and movement of hands and fingers on another person's back. Another example is *Hiljaisuuden tie* ['Way of silence'] (Harjunpää 2017) which introduces a collection of exercises that incorporate Hatha yoga with Christian Mystical tradition and praying with the whole body. Both methods include practices that can be applied as bodily prayer to an ordinary worship service.

These newer trends that challenge the touching culture of avoidance elucidate the tension that exists between the longing to be touched and the fear of being touched. In the context of liturgy, I see the case of the greeting of peace with a handshake as an example of this. As an ecumenical corporeal liturgical act, it is suggested in the contemporary manual, but at the same time, it is not obligatory in any way. The reason for the tension lies in the variety of touching cultures that the worship attendees bring along in their bodies. There are the still widely present ones where individuals prefer not to be touched by another person, or those that see touching in worship as something unnecessary compared to the so-called intellectual or mental participation in the liturgy. An attendee of a Finnish Lutheran liturgy may enter the church either hoping to be touched with warmth, friendliness, and respect, that is, with 'tact' (Kearney 2021: 10), or being afraid of an awkward moment to come when they should shake hands with a stranger. Ritual touching is not separate from the prevailing touching cultures in church and society. This tension in the context of Finnish Lutheran liturgy needs further research beyond the scope of this article.

As a constructive suggestion for how to proceed with this issue of touching in liturgy, I return to what I reported above about my observations during our touching workshop. When there is the freedom to choose your preferred way of touching, it can be eye-contact with a smile, instead of a handshake, that builds up the mutual tuning-in-relationship, a tactful potential space where an experience of safety and respect can be achieved in the middle of the dynamics and changes which also are parts of a ritual (see Post 2022: 747). When the recent global pandemic made us avoid handshakes in general, I encountered advice in Finnish Lutheran worship services that the greeting of peace be exchanged by waving one's hand and smiling to one's neighbour. This shows me that ritual touching is something more than just the bare act. It is an attitude to touch and to be touched safely and respectfully.

Listening as a way of liturgy (Hilkka-Liisa Vuori)

Discussions with Riikka, Leena, and Tuomas have led my thoughts towards the multiplicity of touching methods. Touching, listening, showing respect, and maintaining one's own space can all take place in the liturgy. In the liturgy, all senses need to be considered holistically with body, mind, and heart. I concentrate on the act of listening with the ears and heart.

Chanting in the liturgical context is a way of crossing bodily, mental, and spiritual borders. Voice and sound connect people with each other and also with the space they are chanting in. The liturgy of Christian churches is celebrated in the resemblance of the everlasting worship of angels around God's throne in heaven. The main work of angels in heaven is to sing and praise God. Keeping this image in mind, this should be central also in the Christian worship (S. Seppälä 2016: 230; H. Seppälä 2018: 184).

The Benedictine rule begins with the words 'Audi filio' or 'Audi filia' – 'Listen son', 'Listen daughter' (Lehmijoki-Gardner & Ainonen 2011). These words refer to the obedient heart and the obedient life of a monastery, but they can also be interpreted as concrete advice to listen. We tend to produce sound, speech, and song with a focus on ourselves. When we are praising God according to the image set by angels, our attention might leave us and go towards God. But are we listening to him or our own prayer? Is our singing powering over other people's voices or do we support and give room and attention to a fellow participant's chanting?

In many sources considering liturgy, it is made very clear that the focus should be more on attentive receiving than on producing, more on active listening than on singing, and more on you than on me. Saint Birgitta of Sweden (1303–1373) describes this hospitality in her singing orders. She underlines that sisters should first chant with uniformity in their minds, and only secondarily with uniformity in their voices. Respecting others in one's mind leads to harmonious singing. According to Birgitta, the chanting should be humble, but with a burning heart, with full voice but without bringing forth all of one's own singing capacity (Sancta Birgitta; Vuori 2011: 133–142).

The culture of listening and that kind of obedience is present in the chanting. One is supposed to sing with a listening attitude. That way one's voice is not predominant but one should hear others more. My interpretation of Birgitta's singing instructions is that she is referring to the culture of listening to God and others – crossing the borders – with a generous attitude. The unison in the minds can be reached only if a person's attitude toward a fellow being is very respectful. Musicologist and Orthodox theologian, Professor Hilkka Seppälä, describes the happenings of Pentecost in similar terms. The Holy Ghost advises everybody to sing with unison in mind, unison in voice – 'So that we would praise the most sacred Spirit with one mind' (H. Seppälä 2018: 53). The idea of combining

the wisdom of long tradition with an open mind and open ears of today's worshipper is central also to Riikka's article.

Listening with heart, body, and mind is approached in this article within various liturgical contexts. The aspect is also pedagogical. In my pedagogical studies, with the aim of deepening the understanding of teaching at university level, I met similar ideas about the importance of listening to others, though in the secular context. In her lecture and book *Generous thinking: A radical approach to saving the university* (2019), Kathleen Fitzpatrick addresses the university and society with ideas about active hospitality in communication. Fitzpatrick is an American humanist whose main interest is in the openness of scholarly communication and research. I felt that the thoughts of Saint Birgitta and Saint Benedict were being expressed in modern words in sociological research by Fitzpatrick for modern society: the university. She introduces generosity as a way to live a better life in university and society (ibid.).

Fitzpatrick suggests that one should learn to practise generosity in thinking and listening through everyday practices as a regular workout, just like we exercise or go to the gym to take care of our bodies, or meditate. Through regular mental practice of generous thinking, it becomes part of the structure of our everyday life. The practice of generosity requires the will to listen to other people with an attentive mind. But it should not be one-sided. Especially in cases of disagreement, the listening should be mutual, or at least have the potential for mutuality. Fitzpatrick wishes to lead universities away from the competitive state of mind towards generosity (Fitzpatrick 2019: 67–77; Vuori 2020: 111).

The regular, repeated, even everyday practice of generous thinking, or hospitality as mutual listening, could be a central practice of communication in the liturgy with all attendees present. Crossing the borders in liturgical life can be achieved through discussions and words of intelligence and diplomacy. Nonetheless, more attention should be given to the ritual character of the liturgy, which encompasses chanting and praising, including touching as a way of listening and respect. When I listen to another person or the minister, or the priest, I allow myself to be touched. Is the whole idea of crossing the mental and bodily borders the same as letting myself be holistically touched, and allowing myself to touch as well?

I suggest that when we are holistically touched within the ritual, we are also possibly sensing the holiness. Could it be said that sensing the holiness is the same thing as listening with the heart? This is an act where we do not have human-made borders or borders between churches and liturgies.

On ritual touching

In our working group, we let ourselves be touched by each other. Conversations felt fruitful because we all shared the same enthusiasm for finding out how to understand each other, even though we come from different backgrounds and Christian denominations. The concept of touching in the liturgy became broader after every discussion: the touch of music, the bonding of sung prayer, the touching of lips – with the icon or with the bread and wine in the eucharist, the touching of scents and candles, and the touching of eyes. The eyes meet the icons, other persons, and the beauty of the church. There is also a touch of hands in the greeting and prayer. The common ground of all these forms of touching, crossings of bodily as well as mental borders, is the safety of a known ritual. A familiar ritual creates a safe haven in time and within the space of a church, and between the attendees – either singing-listening or silently listening – in the context of reaching to the world unseen in the resemblance of heavenly worship.

Safety forms a basis for ritual touching. It arises from borders – borders that are protecting and positive. Protecting borders enable connecting and tuning in with others while maintaining identity. Safety includes the possibility of acting according to the degree of comfort one feels in the presence of others and within the shared space. This does not need to mean remaining unchanged since borders can be tested and explored, and through this process, it may be possible to find new viewpoints to existing ideas. However, testing one's own borders requires courage and openness since it contains plenty of not knowing and uncertainty that arises from the ritual's dynamic and changeable nature, which can even bear surprises within this safe place.

In addition to safety, another essential feature of ritual touching is respect. It includes acknowledging and accepting existing boundaries and the variety of thoughts, traditions, and backgrounds. Respect is shown for other people as well as for oneself and for the Divine. It is about respect when different forms of touching are used sensitively and with an attentive and open mind. In the ritual we can be touched by the Divine, which is outside of our intellectual analysis and not dependent on our conscious comprehension. Ritual touching, meeting at and across borders, is about searching for connection through respect and love without containing compulsion of any kind.

Ritual touching provides a means for different needs, traditions, and experiences to interact. Longing to be touched and fear of being touched are acknowledged and respected within the same space. We consider touching through different senses equal – warmth, friendliness, and respect can be achieved through all of them. Instead of prioritising some of the forms above others, we want to acknowledge individual preferences concerning touching. Whatever the form, it is implemented with a generous attitude. This being said, it is important to note that we do not want to cover the presence of inappropriate, violent,

and unilateral touching and the problems it creates. All societies and church communities have had to wrestle painfully with the consequences of harmful touching in recent years. Our goal is to point to positive ways forward.

Ritual touching as a concept means giving a definition to the already existing encounters in the ritual of Mass and liturgy. It is also a way to give touching more varied forms within a ritual. The recognition of the variety of ritual forms of touching is a possibility for regular attendees to learn something new about the worship they already think they know. On the other hand, for newcomers, the deep layers of prayer can be opened up through regular practice of rituals of touching (cf. Senn 2016: 380).

Conclusions

We have been discussing the meaning of the ritual of Mass and liturgy in relation to borders. During our conversations, our understanding has grown. The mental and bodily borders can be crossed in multiple ways, but it requires respect and continuous dialogue. All the various forms of border crossings can be included within the concept of ritual touching. The safe haven of one's liturgy offers the possibility of being touched through all our senses. Ritual touching shifts the focus from oneself to the other. Instead of my own voice, I hear more the voice of other people and God. It is about stepping out of individualism and about meeting God through other people. The ritual provides safety which in turn allows us also to open up more to the touch of the invisible, towards the sense of holiness and divinity. Divinity, which is essentially met also through other attendees of the liturgy, the community in the holy communion. The idea from Western monasticism, listening with one's heart, can be described as a sense of holiness. It is a bridge, which helps us to cross the border even between liturgies and churches.

We understand that exposing oneself to (ritual) touching is a sensitive matter. Different denominational and tradition-related boundaries, different touching cultures, and our individual customs and experiences may prevent us from doing so, or at least hamper it, even when the environment and the atmosphere are as safe and respectful as possible. Unease, doubt, fear, or even anger may arise, and they need to be acknowledged. The choice not to be touched should be accepted as well, since as mentioned earlier, any kind of force is not involved in this concept.

When considering our concept of ritual touching, it is essential to acknowledge that this is a form of touching which has meaning in the known ritual. There are ways to be touched, which are directed at the same time to everybody attending. This kind of touching is, for example, the chants sung together, or the smell of incense filling the church. On the other hand, there are moments of being touched individually, a feeling that

the liturgy is reaching and touching me at this very moment, like the bread on my lips, or my hand in yours for a brief moment. On the other hand, what is personally touching to one person, can feel like togetherness for another person. This is one beauty of ritual touching; it is lived in the moment.

What we have not considered in this article, is the touch of silence in the ritual. It can fill our senses from inside to outer listening, or from our outer being into our very core. We have wanted to bring forth many different kinds and forms of ritual touching. Could it be that through understanding the seen, heard, smelling, and tasting ways of touching, we can move into a deeper understanding of ritual touching, which happens in the silences of divine service?

Looking towards the future, we want to ask: can we create new forms of ritual touching or renew the old ones within the liturgies? What do we need as separate Christian churches and in ecumenical gatherings? Should we first try to pray, be ritually touched together, and only then act, rather than what we usually tend to do: discuss first, act, and then pray? When praying together in silence, in chanting, or through all our senses, the essential form of the prayer is hospitality and generosity. That way the ritual can be a place where everybody can feel accepted through a welcoming attitude – not only despite the borders but also because of them. With a subtle touch towards the borders, we can acknowledge and accept our differences and meet the other person in a communal way.

Bibliography

Group discussions

21 January 2022

15 February 2022

16 March 2022

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